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# Pathway to the Podium: Situating Rhetorical Agency within the Tommie Smith and John Carlos 1968 Mexico City Olympic Protest

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PATHWAY TO THE PODIUM:  
SITUATING RHETORICAL AGENCY WITHIN THE TOMMIE SMITH AND JOHN  
CARLOS 1968 MEXICO CITY OLYMPIC PROTEST

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Communication Studies

San José State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

andrew laurence carter

August 2014

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APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION STUDIES

SAN JOSÉ STATE UNIVERSITY

August 2014

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## ABSTRACT

### PATHWAY TO THE PODIUM: SITUATING RHETORICAL AGENCY WITHIN THE TOMMIE SMITH AND JOHN CARLOS 1968 MEXICO CITY OLYMPIC PROTEST

by andrew laurence carter

The recent romanticization and celebration of the Tommie Smith and John Carlos 1968 Mexico City Olympic Protest has allowed contemporary American society to recognize both athletes as heroes and pioneers within the Civil Rights movement. They have been honored with a number of awards both nationally and internationally, as well as memorialized with a 22-foot high statue that was erected on the campus of San José State University in 2005. From once being ostracized as national villains, Smith and Carlos have come full circle in how they are referenced within public consciousness.

However this recent transformation on the part of contemporary society has come at a cost. While they are no longer vilified as radicals, the current treatment of their legacy erases much of the rhetorical work and political agency that their protest generated. In this thesis, using Kenneth Burke's "Equipment for Living," I offer an alternate reading of their protest, highlighting the importance of access. Through a critique of their legacy as it is currently written, I argue that if we recognize the Smith and Carlos narrative as a "story about access" as opposed to a "story about personal merit," it functions as more effective "Equipment for Living" by helping to codify reoccurring situations in which people have limited access to valuable social institutions and resources.

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*This thesis is dedicated to the loving memory of my mother Dru Ann Carter (1957-2011).*

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## **Introduction**

“I had no regrets, I have no regrets, I will never have any regrets. We were there to stand up for human rights and to stand up for black Americans. We wanted to make them better in the United States.” – Tommie Smith

The year was `68. The political and social climate that encapsulated the United States was volatile and on the verge of exploding. Certain events – the backlash associated with the Vietnam War, the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, the overall rise in poverty – led to tensions within the country. In addition to these events, social activist movements materialized during this time adding more fuel to the fire. The entire 1960s in general were rampant with social movements. Activism ranging from the feminist movement, to the LGBT movement, to the Hispanic/Chicano movement as well as the American Indian Movement (AIM) invoked a strong public outcry against social injustices in the country.

One of the more pivotal movements taking shape during this time that has since become synonymous with 1960s America was the Civil Rights movement. Up until this point in U.S. history, the enforcement of Jim Crow Laws brought legal segregation and a “separate but equal” mandate against African-Americans. As a group, they endured legalized, institutionalized racism and were socially and politically disenfranchised. The 1960s, however, proved an essential time of growth for the Civil Rights movement. With the prohibition of Jim Crow and legalized separation following the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the movement had already made considerable strides. Additionally, the 24th Amendment to the Constitution and the rise in black leadership created political and

social momentum. However, discrimination remained prevalent, inequalities in education and employment persisted. Most cultural minorities continued to be treated as second-class citizens and race relations were tenuous to say the least.

Against the backdrop of this political and social turmoil, the Olympic Games took place in Mexico City, Mexico. While the Games appeared unaffected by the larger social tumult, African-American athletes brought a perspective informed by their political work. Going into those Games, most of the competing African-American athletes felt an overall sense of hypocrisy from the United States in how they were treated as citizens and remained conflicted with their role as Olympic athletes. On the one hand, they were proud of their race for its tolerance and ability to survive and fought against the negative images of Black inferiority; on the other hand their aspirations for success in American sport necessitated that they adhere to values upheld in the dominant society (Wiggins, 1997). Additionally, those athletes that did not turn professional after college found very few financial opportunities and almost no institutional support in the United States once their eligibility had finished. The Olympics offered these athletes a chance at international fame, lucrative advertising contracts, and at least temporary acceptance by mainstream White American society (Plec, 2009).

This dichotomy involved a number of other important factors, including the fact that “African-American athletes strove for success in an institution not only controlled by Whites, but whose basic structure was defined by White standards” (Wiggins, 1997, p. 201). Growing increasingly frustrated with their placement in American society, many of

these athletes began to look for ways to speak out. Understanding the possible ramifications that could be done to their potential future athletic careers, they decided to come together and collectively make the Olympic stage a place to protest against racial injustice and discrimination.

For these athletes, in addition to the extensive attention that could be drawn to the cause on a global level, they chose the Games as a strategic choice to conduct a widespread protest, mainly due to the apolitical nature associated with the Olympics. Traditionally, the Olympics have maintained a strong policy against mixing politics with sport. The event endorses an environment focused strictly on the arena of sport and any type of social or political agenda that takes place is strongly discouraged (though the Olympics by design promotes nationalism). However, through active protest, athletes could resistively gain power by challenging these traditions and values and what they stood for.

Consequently, during the year leading up the Olympics, a small group of competing athletes and activists formed a coalition to engineer an African-American boycott of the 1968 Games under the official title of the Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR) (Hartmann, 1996). The purpose of the protest was not only to bring recognition to the movement, but also to transform the Olympic Games from simply a sporting venue into a larger rhetorical moment within the narrative of both African-American and Civil Rights history. On December 15, 1967 in New York, the OPHR committee issued a statement outlining their objectives for a proposed boycott.

Among the major aims were: (1) to stage an international protest of the persistent and systematic violation of Black people's rights, (2) to expose America's historical exploitation of Black athletes as political propaganda tools in both national and international arenas, (3) to establish a standard of political responsibility among Black athletes, and (4) to bring awareness to Black communities of the "hidden" dynamics and consequences of their sports involvement (Edwards, 1979). By using their social influence as Olympic athletes, the OPHR hoped to shine a light on the injustices and racial prejudices happening within America.

While the scope of this boycott was wide-ranging and well organized, the athletes could not come to a consensus about its execution and it never did materialize. Instead, a number of athletes associated with the project agreed to participate individually in alternative forms of protest. During the early days of the track and field competition, some of these alternative protests included wearing black socks and berets throughout the preliminary heats (Hartmann, 1996).

Of the various individual demonstrations that took place, one came to epitomize the historical moment. After finishing in first and third place, respectively, in the 200m final, Tommie Smith and John Carlos, two sprinters from San José State College, decided to stage a demonstration on the podium stand during the medal ceremony. Their goal was to not only protest their own experiences with racism inside and outside of sports, but also the persistence of poverty, inequality and racism within the U.S. (Leonard and King, 2009).

While on the podium, they used a number of symbolic gestures to communicate their message, including wearing African beads to represent the history of lynching in the United States, going shoeless to represent poverty, wearing buttons reading “Olympic Project for Human Rights” placed over the USA logo on their uniforms, and most memorably, raising black gloved hands in defiant clenched fists while bowing their heads when “The Star Spangled Banner” played (MacAloon, 1982). Their demonstration became a seminal moment of the 1968 Games and would eventually alter the way that political activism among athletes is regarded within the framework of the Olympics and the American institution of sport.

### **Social Impact of the Smith and Carlos Podium Moment**

Booed out of the stadium, Smith and Carlos’ protest at the Mexico City Olympics seemed at the time a failure but has since become a watershed moment within American history. Their podium protest is now an international symbol for human rights struggle and the fight for equality. The image of the raised fist is “undoubtedly one of the world’s most famous and enduring sports images, as it has been widely reproduced within the past forty years” (Osmond, 2010, p. 120). The image itself has become central to the event itself, yet it is typically published “without any critical commentary or explanation, as if its significance were wholly self-sufficient or self-evident, a picture worth literally a thousand words” (Hartmann, 2003, p. 8). The vision had by both athletes going into those Games has stood the test of time, as its social impact is still noticed to this day.

While the Smith and Carlos legacy is largely viewed as a cultural milestone, the immediate aftermath following their podium gesture was extremely polarizing. The event quickly became front page news around the world and the reactions were widespread, with some countries offering support to the athletes and what they represented and others vilifying them. The American media in particular took both athletes to task. On the cover of *Time* magazine, the Olympic motto of “faster, higher, stronger” was replaced with “angrier, nastier, uglier,” to describe the “public display of petulance” by Smith and Carlos (Bass, 2002, p. 274). The Associated Press (AP) described them as engaging in a Nazi-like salute (Davis, 2008). One of the sharpest criticisms came from world-renowned journalist Brent Musburger, who at the time was a staff writer for the *Chicago American*. Musburger called their protest an “ignoble performance” that “completely overshadowed” a magnificent athletic one (Hartmann, 1996). Marking their race, Musburger compared Smith and Carlos to “a pair of dark-skinned storm troopers” and argued that they should have avoided the award ceremony altogether (Hartmann, 1996). In addition to the harsh media criticism, both athletes were reprimanded by their sport as well. Within two days of conducting their demonstration, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) expelled Smith and Carlos from the Olympic Village and banned them from competition. The result of their demonstration also affected the entire Olympic team itself as to this day the 1968 American Olympic team is the only one not to have been invited to the White House.

Despite these criticisms, some supported Smith and Carlos and what they stood for. The *Pittsburgh Courier* praised both athletes and criticized the racism of the IOC by

running a cartoon of a giant black gloved fist rising above the Olympic stadium with the caption “pride prevails” (Henderson, 2010). In addition, Smith and Carlos were viewed as heroes within the Black community, and were paid tributes by a number of Black leaders. It was not just the Black community who supported both athletes, as the 2<sup>nd</sup> place winner in the 200m race, Peter Norman, showed his support by wearing an Olympic Project for Human Rights button on his warm up jacket while on the medal stand. Other athletes offered support as well, such as the Harvard crew team, who issued this statement to the *New York Times* in support of both athletes:

We – as individuals – have been concerned with the place of the black man in American society and his struggle for equal rights. As members of the United States Olympic team, each of us has come to feel a moral commitment to support our black teammates in their efforts to dramatize the injustices and inequities which permeate our society (Lipsyte, 1968).

However, the brewing controversy surrounding their demonstration would follow both athletes for many years. When the athletes returned home, they faced ridicule and came back to nothing (Smith, 2007). They were more or less blackballed from American society to the point where they could not find work or support their families. They could not compete professionally in track and field because the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) banned them from Olympic, international, and national competition (Smith, 2007). John Carlos tried a short stint playing football in Canada, but his career was cut short due to injury. He never completed his degree and had no qualifications to

fall back on. As a result he ended up doing odd jobs to make ends meet, including working as a bouncer in a bar (Henderson, 2010). In one of his lowest points, his wife committed suicide and Carlos admitted it had a lot to do with the legacy of 1968 (Moore, 1991). Tommie Smith also tried his hand at football, playing for the Cincinnati Bengals practice squad, before subsequently being cut. His marriage broke down, he received death threats, and he was unable to make ends meet before taking a coaching job in Santa Monica (Henderson, 2010).

The athletes would not get their just due until decades later. Considering all of the negative reactions and criticism that the protest generated, it was ultimately deemed successful and their message compelling. Both Smith and Carlos were trailblazers who charted pathways for political and social activism among black athletes. Contemporary activist athletes, such as NBA center Etan Thomas and former UCLA linebacker Ramogi Huma, have credited Smith and Carlos for opening doors for them to have a platform to speak out on social issues and stand up for a cause. Today, Smith and Carlos are viewed as heroes and pioneers within the Civil Rights movement. The image of their podium salute has become a cultural reference point in much the same way as Dr. Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech (Henderson, 2010). Among the numerous awards and recognition they have received, they were inducted into the Bay Area Sports Hall of Fame in 1999. In 2005, both received honorary doctorate degrees from SJSU. That same year, SJSU erected a statue, memorializing both athletes and their demonstration. A mural of the iconic image was painted on a building in Sydney, Australia in the lead up to



the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games. And in 2008, both Smith and Carlos were presented the Arthur Ashe Award for Courage for their podium protest at the ESPY awards.

## **Preview**

The Tommie Smith and John Carlos 1968 Mexico City Protest combines many different social dynamics and complexities which allow for a multitude of analyses. This thesis aims to study the rhetorical dimensions of the narrative surrounding the Smith and Carlos protest, drawing from it a way of advancing how conceptions of rhetorical agency are theorized. Through rhetorical analysis, this project offers insights into the conversation on rhetorical agency and the role it plays in social change and social justice movements. It also identifies specific rhetorical strategies, or what Kenneth Burke (1941) calls “Equipment for Living” for the future. Guiding the reader through a historical narrative of the Smith and Carlos legacy, the overarching goal of this thesis is to offer a case study that provides sense making into how socially and politically disenfranchised cultural/racial minorities operate within an oppressive social structure and what is necessary for these groups to rise up and gain resistive spaces of power and human agency pathways.

The project unfolds as follows: Chapter one provides a working definition of rhetorical agency as well as highlights scholarly work that focuses on the relationship between the ideology of sport and society. Chapter two introduces the methodological framework that supports the study and specifically the notion of Kenneth Burke’s “Equipment for Living.” This method was selected because it finds, in rhetorical

artifacts, lessons and strategies that we can apply in the future. Chapter three examines the Smith and Carlos statue, image and legacy as it currently reads and offers an alternative “Equipment for Living” towards how we define them. Chapter four examines the personal biographies of Smith and Carlos to offer an alternate way of how we read their personal narrative and sports narratives in general. Through my critique of their biographies, the aim is to help recapture the political part of their legacy and make their rhetorical “Equipment” available to future generations in a wider context. Chapter five concludes the thesis with suggestions for future research.

## Chapter One: Literature Review

### Rhetorical Agency

Theories of agency are well established in numerous fields of social science. The study of agency has become significant within these fields as the amount of agency that is awarded or found within texts, speeches, audiences, et cetera can affect the entire scope and capacity of how such rhetorical situations are viewed (Barnett, 2005). In communication studies, agency is recognized as the ability of an individual to take meaningful action. The conception of agency looks at the individual's ability to have the power to resist, subvert, and refashion his or her own social reality versus a reality as pre-constructed by larger ideological discourses. Rhetorical theorist Cheryl Geisler (2004) broadly defines the term as "the capacity of the rhetor to act" (p. 12) and Ahern (2001) similarly as "the socio-culturally mediated capacity to act" (p. 112). The construction of agency is created through the process of communication both pragmatically, in the sense that communication is motivated and done with a specific purpose, as well as constitutively, in the sense that communication is a process of social construction.

Kohrs-Campbell (2005) argues that agency is a learned art in that "it involves the study, training, and experience that enable one to recognize what means are available in a given situation" (p. 6). The location of agency within rhetorical situations; however, is never a constant, being characterized by scholars in the field as promiscuous, protean, and ambiguous (Sowards, 2010; Kohrs-Campbell, 2005). Herndl and Licona (2007) argue that agency exists in a "diffuse and shifting social location in time and space, into

which rhetors move uncertainly” (p. 1). In this context, Kohrs-Campbell (2005) notes that rhetors, because they are linked to cultures and collectivities, are best described as “points of articulation” rather than originators (p. 5).

For marginalized groups, constraints on agency are predominately based on a lack of social capital and access to structural resources. For these groups, gaining access to the dominant cultural and social institutions that control society becomes imperative in the quest to generate agency. As Giddens (1984) argues, agency is “not the intentions people have in doing things, but to their capability of doing those things in the first place,” (p. 9). Because marginalized groups are disenfranchised both politically and socially, they do not possess the “capability” to act, resulting in a silenced political voice and an oppressive social order to flourish. This status quo social order becomes reinforced through hegemony.

### **Hegemony**

For dominant groups, gaining control of collective agency within the social order is achieved through a process of power not predicated so much on coercive power or physical means of rule, but through “intellectual and moral leadership” in what Gramsci (1981) defines as cultural hegemony. Hegemony is a situation “in which powerful groups and institutions create in those they dominate the belief that such domination is natural, commonsensical and the way things ought to be” (Brummett, 2011, p. 163). Hegemony is an important social function for dominant groups to control society because it allows marginalized and oppressed groups to not only accept, but subconsciously

participate in their own domination. In a cultural hegemony the subtlest means by which power maintains itself are disguised. They do not display themselves as a source of power and, as a result, the tools of ideology and hegemony tend to be occluded in that people are typically not aware of the ways in which they are empowered and disempowered (Brummett, 2011).

Historically there have been many examples of cultural hegemonies that have existed within society. The most common example of hegemony in the United States is the dominant American wealthy class gaining supremacy through the control of all major institutions (media, government, educational system, etc.). This is evident in everything ranging from biases within the media to policies created by government. One cultural institution in the United States that has traditionally been infused with dominant cultural hegemonic values is the arena of sport. As an institution, the sporting world is typically not associated as a place of power and domination by the American public, rather quite the opposite. Therefore, the rest of this chapter will look to unmask and demystify culturally persistent hegemonic ideologies that exist within sports. The specific purpose for this review of scholarship is to provide a context into how we read the agency generated in the Smith and Carlos Olympic protest, along with new insight into how we view athletes and traditional athletic values, such as: hard work, perseverance, and dedication.

## **Sport and Society**

Since the beginning of time, the impact and influence that sport has carried within societies is immense. Dating back to the Roman Empire, gladiatorial contests served as a primetime form of entertainment and were attended by all members of society from commoners to the wealthy and powerful. Successful gladiators not only gained a level of acceptance among the elite class, but also a level of fame and wealth as a result of their athletic endeavors. As Marvin (2006) notes, the corporeal virtuosity of an athlete's body affords them certain agency pathways within society.

Looking forward to contemporary society, the arena of sport has catapulted into one of the most powerful institutions worldwide. In the United States alone, the National Football League has taken over as the highest rated form of entertainment, projecting revenue streams of over \$25 billion in a little over a decade (Kaplan, 2010). The broadcasting rights for sporting events has flourished into a multi-billion dollar business, with prominent networks often participating in bidding wars to secure television rights. For the modern athlete, it has become commonplace to see superstars sign eight and nine figure contracts as well as endorsement deals rivaling the same numbers. As sport has entered into the realm of big business, the value of sports franchises has reached an all time high, with clubs consistently being valued at over \$2 billion. All in all, the institution of sport continues to grow and represent an even larger platform than ever before. In terms of access, elite athletes are provided a public platform had by very few in society.

Aside from the massive amounts of revenue that are generated as evidence of the popularity of sport worldwide, a key reason for this level of interest and fandom stems from the view that many hold sport as the great equalizer in society. As it relates to fairness and equal opportunity, sport is an institution that has historically been viewed as transparent and free from any type of social or political influence. Additionally, there is a widely held belief that sport is one of the few cultural arenas that functions as a true meritocracy, where people succeed and fail based on personal merit. In general, most people subscribe to the notion that if you work hard, possess good skills, and maintain a positive attitude, then you will achieve success; if you are lazy, unskilled, and unmotivated, then you will fail and will have no one to blame but yourself (Kaufman and Wolff, 2010). Washington and Karen (2011) argue that by having both greater popularity and public transparency than other institutions, sport demonstrates most clearly the links between meritocratic practices – choosing and rewarding the most talented individuals, independent of background and/or connections – and organizational success or in other words, winning.

Along with this concept of fair play and equal competition, the sports world has long been heralded as a world free of racism, in that most Americans attest to the general belief that sport transcends race, or at least that the sports arena represents an ideal space for racial indeterminacy (B'be 'ri and Hogarth, 2009). Many advocates of positive impact of sports on race relations claim “it is an important public symbol of and institutional model for racial progress, with some arguing that sport’s own ideals of fairness and meritocracy were themselves the essence of social and racial justice in the

United States” (Young, 1963, p. 156). As sociologist Douglas Hartmann (2000) notes, sport is seen by most Americans as a positive and progressive social force, an avenue of racial progress, and an arena of racial harmony; it is understood as a “way out of the ghetto,” the great racial “equalizer,” and a leader in Civil Rights, if not a literal model for race relations in the United States (p. 232).

Particularly as it relates to racial and ethnic minorities, sport has traditionally been recognized as serving an emancipatory function, in that it offers groups that have historically been politically and socially disenfranchised an opportunity to master a craft and become successful in a way that is considered pro-social and within the parameters of societal standards. As many realms of society are often deemed out of bounds or inaccessible by these groups, gaining entrance into non-traditional social spaces such as the arena of sport has the power to allow these groups institutional access into the mainstream.

Viewing sport through the theoretical lens of agency, sport has typically been recognized as one of the few places where there exists “free agency” in that the most talented and hardest working individuals will always be rewarded. In the same way that rhetorical agency is accessible through the structural institutions of society such as education and enrichment programs, rhetorical scholar Debra Hawhee (2004) argues that sport functions in that same vein, paralleling the process of athletic training with its repetition of movement and its goal of training the body to respond to opponents with



rhetoric as performance, which similarly relies on a kind of embodied knowledge.

Hawhee (2004) notes:

When viewed in terms of education, rhetoric's relation to athletics hinges on a kind of knowledge production that occurs on the level of the body, displacing the mind or consciousness as the primary locus of learning. Athletic training most clearly exemplifies the role of repetition and imitation in habit production, and the way in which the body takes over in agonistic situations. This is not to say that 'mind,' or thought, is not important, but rather that it is part of a complex—a mind-body complex—that learns and moves in response to a situation rather than through the application of abstract principles (pp. 9-10).

### **Problems with our Current Conceptions of Sport**

While many tout the emancipatory and meritocratic potential that sport has on greater society, there are those that argue the arena of sport is highly politicized and carries many of the same cultural values and patterns as other social institutions. There has been a considerable amount of scholarship dedicated to this topic alone. Scholars such as Lawson (1979) argue, "Sport serves generally as a carrier of the dominant ideology and many of the behavioral patterns which characterize the socio-cultural context in which it is embedded" (p. 188). Anderson (2009) argues that America's emphasis on sport as providing an equal pathway to everyone to upward social mobility works to reinforce the existing class structure in America.

Evidence of this stems from differences in pay structure in most American sports organizations, which posits minority players typically at the bottom and White team owners and officials at the top, to the overall lack of minorities in coaching and leadership roles both in the college and professional ranks. In this regard, Edwards (1979) argues similarly that the values reinforced by sport represent those of the dominant group. “In the United States, this means that the value emphasis in sport is oriented to the ideological interests of middle and upper-class White males who dominate fandom as well as every instrumental sphere of American life” (Edwards, 1979, p. 117). According to Edwards (1979), it therefore becomes advantageous to maintain a substantial White male presence in sport, particularly in positions of leadership and authority, if sport is to optimally fulfill its functions of reinforcing and reaffirming established structural and ideological relationships, even despite the “meritocracy” myth. This helps illustrate why “leadership” positions in sports, such as quarterback in football and catcher in baseball, as well as most management and ownership positions have historically been filled by White males.

Sociologist Susan Birrell (2003) notes that American cultural views of sport “provide a particularly public display of relations of dominance and subordination” (p. 45). Birrell (1989) argues that placed alongside the common narratives of sport as “an important stage of manhood, equal opportunity employer, and as a reward for and a marker of the good life” is the growing discussion of sport “as a site for the reproduction of relations of privilege and oppression, and of dominance and subordination structured along race and class lines” (p. 45). B’be ’ri and Hogarth (2009) note that the problem

with the common narratives of sport is that “they allow people to ignore the finer racial issues that pervade the sport world, be it racial stacking, disparities in opportunity, white dominance of ownership, coaching, and the very means of representation” (p. 91). Along these lines, Hartmann (1996) argues that sport is, at least with respect to race in America, best understood as a contested terrain – that is to say, a social space where racial images, ideologies and inequalities are constantly and very prominently constructed, transformed and struggled over.

### **Sport in the Black Community**

Throughout history, many of the dominant ideologies of sport have become naturalized and accepted within American consciousness. Particularly within the Black community, there has always been a strong emphasis placed on sport’s capability as an equal opportunity employer, and it is often singularly recognized as a way out of poverty. In these terms, there are many who recognize sports as a precious commodity within the Black community (Harris, 1997). Especially among poor Blacks, sport is seen as one of the few legitimate ways toward upward mobility. Additionally, this notion is reinforced by the mainstream media. As noted by sociologist Othello Harris (1997), “nearly every article written about African-American athletes by sports magazines (i.e. Sports Illustrated, Sport, etc.) tell of the same situation: athletes' rise from the ghetto or drug-infested neighborhood to success” (p. 311). These stories are meant to serve as evidence of sport's capacity to elevate a person’s status through personal hard work and determination.

However, as far as political and social advancement, the overwhelming belief in the power of sport as a mechanism towards upward mobility for the African-American community has had deleterious effects on the community as a whole. As Anderson (2009) notes, impoverished communities often view sports as one of the few vehicles out of poverty; and for those who are not as academically inclined, or for those who have never applied the same rigor of sport to their academics, athletics can seem the only way out. As a result, for much of the Black community, sport has become synonymous with pathways out of poverty.

Consequently, this overwhelming emphasis on the potential of sport to grant individual agency helps to foster a cycle of poverty and reaffirm the status quo. Resulting from this, “young African-Americans spend their energies and talents on athletic skills rather than pursuing occupations that would help them meet their political and material needs, because of their belief in the “sports as a way up” myth” (qtd. in Eitzen, 2001, p. 260). Thus, many remain dependent on Whites and White institutions.

Edwards (1979) notes similarly that due to the singular visibility of Black athlete role models, disproportionately high numbers of Black youth are channeled into athletic career aspirations. This process is reinforced by the limited number and the lower visibility of Black success in other high prestige occupational categories. Statistics show that although Blacks make up 11-12% of the U.S. population, they are vastly overrepresented in sport, with Blacks comprising 21% of major league baseball players, 57% of professional football players and 73% of professional basketball players

(Frey and Eitzen, 1991). Even within this arena, however, African-Americans are overrepresented in some areas, and underrepresented in others. Phillips (1976) defines this phenomenon as the “sports opportunity structure,” which states that Blacks are found in sports where facilities, resources, coaching and competition are available to them: the schools and community recreation programs (ctd. in Frey and Eitzen, 1991). They are rarely found, however, in those sports that require the facilities, coaching, and competition typically provided only in private clubs or that are otherwise too expensive or too exclusive to obtain, such as golf, tennis or swimming.

Along these lines, Ogden and Rose (2005) argue that “economic factors, social encounters, and mass media compel African-American youth toward sports more easily played in the urban core and away from sports requiring more resources, time, space, and facilities” (p. 225). As Bourdieu (1984) and others have pointed out, “sports participation is certainly limited by one’s access to various forms of capital—be it economic, cultural, social, symbolic, or political” (qtd. in Kaufman, 2010, p. 164).

### **Exploitation/ Racialized Discourse in the World of Sport**

Much of these embedded ideologies that exist within sport serve to uphold the status quo and in doing so bring into question the legitimacy of a true meritocracy. Moreover, as the narratives of sport successes become grounded in “American Dream” rhetoric, they appear “normalized” and uphold an invisible existence that contributes to the fostering of hegemonic racialized ideologies and discourses which have persisted historically throughout the United States. For example, throughout American history

African-American athletes have been viewed largely by society as the ultimate racialized spectacle and commodity, whose identity is largely controlled by dominant White America. Wiggins (1997) argues that historically, “black athletes have been involved in an institution that fancies itself the great leveler in society, but in actuality is one of the most conservative, tradition-laden institutions in America” (p. 201).

Dating back to the period of slavery, the Black male body was objectified, reducing him to a body and then reducing the body to a thing, essentially dehumanizing the slave and making him an object that could be traded as a commodity (King, 2004). While the harsh conditions of slavery are gone, we still see this commodification of Black bodies continues in the sports world to a certain degree (B’be ’ri and Hogarth, 2009). In America, there remains a mystified image of the Black athlete through a biological obsession with his body (King, 2004). Hegemonic narratives and long-held myths create fascination with the supposed natural athleticism of the African-American male, who allegedly is inherently gifted with muscularity, strength, and speed (Andrews, 2001; B’be ’ri and Hogarth, 2009).

To these points, B’be ’ri and Hogarth (2009) examined the indicators of ideology, discourses and racial meanings that shape the sports culture in America, and they argue that there are largely unspoken racist ideologies in the world of sport. An example that they use is the representation of Black men’s athletic bodies to White America’s spectatorship. Their study found that there are three main components concerning the representation of Black bodies to White audiences, “(1) the obsession with a perceived

biological endowment; (2) the white gaze's power in constructing the black identity; and (3) the return of the black body to its owner as something outside of his own power to define" (B'be'ri and Hogarth, 2009, p. 93). They claim that the White fascination with the Black body has created a set of cultural values that Blacks typically have not had much say in.

As a result, the outside construction of identity for African-Americans reinforces the hyper-visibility of Black and the invisibility of White. This becomes important in that the White gaze has come to define and construct representations of African-Americans, thus defining their reality in public discourse and essentially working to hinder accessibility to other institutions (political, educational, etc.) that offer resources necessary to resist these dynamics.

In addition to constructs of African-American identity, dominant ideologies in the world of sport look towards biological evidence of racial difference to prove superiority and pre-eminence in justifying a natural social order. Particularly within the mainstream media, African-American athletes have historically been represented in this problematic manner. As rhetorical scholar Emily Plec (2009) notes, one major feature of this persistent rhetoric of racism is the myth of inherent Black athletic ability. Plec (2009) conducted an examination on American media sports coverage with the purpose of showing a shift in public discourse about racial identity and inequality. Her analysis found that coverage of certain sporting events showed a persistence of racial biology that

position Black athletes as “natural” athletes in both overt and subtle ways. Plec (2009) states:

Such discourses contribute the reproduction of the rhetoric of racism in three ways: (1) by essentializing difference in racial terms (2) by alluding to a “law of compensation” in which physical ability is juxtaposed with mental acuity (3) by employing dehumanizing comparisons to animals (p. 351).

Plec (2009) claims that by essentializing race as a marker of identity, and connecting Blacks with athletic ability, racial reasoning is promoted whereby Black skin equals physicality, and White skin does not. In the case of a “law of compensation,” Plec (2009) claims that there is a “law” based on a racist logic that states if a Black male has a superior physique, he must be intellectually inferior to the White athlete. “This racist logic is seen mostly among commentator’s comparisons between White athletes being praised for mental quickness, and Black athletes praised for physical quickness” (Plec, 2009, p. 361). Plec (2009) also argues that in addition to these two discourses, racial biology theories sometimes imply that Blacks are closer to non-human animals than Whites (in essence, dehumanizing Blacks by comparing them to animals). In popular culture, arguably the most infamous example of this in American media sports coverage came in 1983, when famed sports announcer Howard Cosell gave a play-by-play description of the African-American Washington Redskins wide receiver, Alvin Garrett, Cosell described Garrett running down the field by saying, ‘Look at that little *monkey* run’ (Haskell, 2009). While many recognize Cosell as one of the greatest announcers in



history, his abject slip of the tongue on a nationally televised broadcast reinforces Plec's claim of a naturalized, commonsensical racist logic among the American sports media.

### **Sport as an Apolitical Institution**

Another way in which these cultural narratives of sport work to reinforce the normative status quo is through controlling the infrastructure by which it exists. This includes not only controlling the governing bodies of sporting institutions, but the athletes as well. In society, there is a widely accepted notion that athletes should "be seen and not heard" and "shut up and play." Howard Cosell called it rule number one in the jockocracy, that athletes should not mix politics with sport. Lipsky (1978) argues that the sports and political economy in America have traditionally been viewed as discrete institutional realms. He notes that, "Sportsworld itself has encouraged the belief that sports are 'fun and games,' and has vigorously fought any attempt at 'outside' regulation" (p. 2). Sports historian John Betts (1974) states, "Except in the suppression of gambling or illegal amusements, Americans traditionally looked upon sport as private in nature, to be regulated by private governing bodies" (p. 376).

Sociologist Peter Kaufman (2010) examined the sociological significance of the activist athlete and he argues that activist athletes challenge the taken-for-granted expectations of other athletes and society in general. His analysis found that activist athletes are considered by society as norm breakers and are treated like others who reject behavioral norms, in a sense they are viewed as deviants (Kaufman, 2010). The study points to the way activist athletes seem to garner more negative reactions than other

entertainer activists such as musicians, actors, and writers. Additionally, other entertainer activists seem more willing to express their political views in public venues like awards ceremonies, political rallies, or on the campaign trail and are less likely to suffer institutional repercussions for doing so (Kaufman, 2010).

However, a closer look into the political dynamics within the arena of sport finds that it is not specifically sports and politics that do not mix, it is sports and a specific type of politics, resistance and protest politics, since it is these types of political actions that threaten to upset the normative order of society and challenge the status quo. As Dave Zirin (2011) argues, it would be naïve to argue against the relationship that exists between politics and sport, because even when it is at its most normal, sports is a staging ground for nationalism, patriotism, sexism, jingoism, racism, et cetera. By controlling the political dimensions of sport, dominant culture can still maintain a stronghold on it as an institution and control the political agency from those involved.

## **Conclusion**

Through a closer examination of American sports ideology, we can see a handful of examples of the ways in which dominant culture has instituted power through cultural hegemony. When we read the Smith and Carlos narrative, we do so through “rose-colored glasses” that is the meritocracy myth. In contemporary society we have come to recognize both athletes as incredibly talented individuals who beat the odds through hard work and dedication, and view their success completely as a result of their own ability. Over time, their narrative has become constructed as somewhat of a blueprint for success

within society, particularly among marginalized communities that anything is achievable through focus and hard work. However as they have become romanticized and memorialized as heroes and pioneers, their story has been written to emphasize certain aspects and omit others.

Their once radical message has been re-fashioned for mass appeal and consumption by the mainstream, and as a result many of these finer racial issues that pervade the sports world have been neglected and completely written out of their narrative. We do not view Smith and Carlos as the exploited marginalized “Other,” rather quite the opposite. They serve as an example for larger society that marginalization is a choice; that one may be born into disintegrating circumstances, but essentially if one is willing to put in the work, there is opportunity for upward mobility. We have come to comprehend their famous raised fist gesture as evidence that we truly live in a free society and political agency is delineated to the hardest working and most deserving individuals.

Overarching, this homogenization of the Smith and Carlos narrative and sports narratives in general allows dominant society to control the institution of sport through hegemonic discourse underscoring its meritocratic principles. In this regard, the rest of this project offers an alternative way about how we think about sports and its perception as a meritocracy through re-writing the Smith and Carlos narrative. As this section of reviewed literature has served to highlight the many dominant ideologies that exist in

sports, the subsequent analysis section will highlight the importance of structural resources to the implementation of social change.

## **Chapter Two: Method Section**

The method that this thesis employs is rhetorical criticism. Rhetorical criticism is the process of investigating and explaining symbolic acts and artifacts for the purpose of understanding rhetorical processes. Rhetoric is defined by Aristotle as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (Roberts, 2005, p. 5). Therefore, in effect, rhetorical criticism is used as a means to persuade and influence. According to Black (1965), the main goal of criticism “seeks to understand humans and the human condition by studying human acts and creations” (p. 9). As a performance of rhetorical knowledge, criticism strategically reconstructs civic discourse in order to redefine its significance (Ivie, 1995). As Ivie (1995) notes, “Criticism reveals and evaluates symbols that organize our lives within particular situations and that constitute the civic substance of motivating political action” (p. 81).

### **Rhetorical Criticism/ “Equipment for Living”**

Literary theorist Kenneth Burke introduced “Equipment for Living” as a form of rhetorical criticism to codify the various strategies which literary artists have developed with relation to the naming and re-naming of situations (Burke, 1941). By naming a situation, Burke theorized we determine how to address it. A “crisis” calls for swift action. A “repeat of history” calls for lessons learned, et cetera. Burke refers to the art of naming situations as “Equipment for Living.” The overarching goal of this method is aimed at understanding texts and discourses within a larger sociological context (Burke, 1941). The specific goal is to identify new ways of naming situations. From a rhetorical

standpoint, by being able to name and re-name reoccurring situations allows us to make available different strategies for dealing with the world around us. As a constitutive theory of communication, “Equipment for Living” allows us to become aware of power dynamics and the unquestioned assumptions that govern our lives. In this thesis, I critique the standard way we name situations that have come to define the agency of athletics and sport in terms of merit and propose alternatives names.

Burke outlines the parameters of “Equipment for Living” by first introducing the critic to proverbs and the social functions that they provide. Here, he claims that proverbs can operate as a way to determine strategies for dealing with life and claims that this analysis of proverbs should extend to incorporate the whole field of literature. Burke (1941) argues that the most complex and sophisticated works of art could be considered ‘proverbs writ large,’ and by extending this framework of analyzing proverbs to include literature could help us discover important facts about literary organization as well as apply literature to life in general, “thus helping to take literature out of its separate bin and give it a place in a general ‘sociological’ picture” (p. 296). Being able to codify reoccurring situations helps name typical social relationships that recur cross culturally and throughout time so frequently that people must “have a word for it” (Burke, 1973; Perks, 2007). This “Equipment” is mixed within the story of the text, but can be taken in different contexts and applied to real life situations.

Although Burke (1941) is mainly concerned with the study of literature in the traditional sense, the principles behind “Equipment for Living” can be extended beyond

the realm of literature to other types of communication forms such as television, films, and other popular culture. Brummett (1984) extends the application of “Equipment for Living” by substituting the term “discourse” for Burke’s literature to encompass other forms of media available for “Equipment” to audiences. In addition to Brummett (1984), recent scholars have discovered new ways to conceptualize Burke’s methodological framework. Lair (2011) states:

Scholars have used “equipment for living” as a way to illustrate how texts have encouraged audiences to respond to the uncertainties and anxieties of a host of contemporary life situations, from family dynamics (Golombisky, 2001), to technologically driven alienation (Stroud, 2001), to the homogenization of urban life (Wood and Todd, 2005) (p.77).

This art of naming situations functions as a way to help us determine how we respond to certain situations. In a general context, essentially anything can be read as “Equipment.” Rhetorical critics have used this concept of “Equipment for Living” to argue that some texts offer better “Equipment” than others depending on the purpose. For example, in the essay “Spectacular Repression: Sanitizing the Batman,” Robert Terrill (2000) argues that the portrayal of Batman by Michael Keaton in the original *Batman* film functions as better “Equipment for Living” for democratic culture than the Val Kilmer character in *Batman Forever*.

In his analysis, Terrill (2000) argues that the original 1989 *Batman* presents Gotham City as a “communal projection of a fractured American psyche, and that the film

invites the audiences to image Batman as a model through which to manage this fragmentation” (p. 495). In this sense, Terrill (2000) finds that the film functions as effective “Equipment for Living” because it presents its audience with an attractive bargain – the audience can avoid the “hard work that psychic maturity demands” if they are willing to accept themselves as “terminally unbalanced, psychologically disintegrated individuals” (Terrill, 1993, p. 334; Terrill, 2000, p. 495). Conversely, Terrill (2000) argues that *Batman Forever* presents no such bargain. Responding to a need to sanitize the Batman and appeal more palatable to audiences, *Batman Forever* is a spectacle, cultural product of little use for individuals negotiating real-life exigencies because its ambiguous nature prevents audiences from being able to relate to similar experiences (p. 496).

In this regard, Terrill (2000) is critiquing the narrative presented in *Batman Forever*, arguing that it works as bad “Equipment” because it “sanitizes” the story. In this thesis, I will essentially look to offer a similar treatment of the Smith and Carlos narrative, arguing that the way their current legacy is read is flawed; however, through my alternative reading their story can be more accessible to audiences.

### **Smith and Carlos Protest Salute as “Equipment for Living”**

As “Equipment,” the Smith and Carlos protest salute is particularly significant for its framing as a management text. Overarching, the concept of “Equipment for Living” can be applied to the Smith and Carlos statue, image and legacy because, in similar fashion as a proverb, they teach us how to name reoccurring situations. As a recognized



image, it is meant to provide us with a way to name other situations, athletic and beyond and therefore suggest a strategy for dealing with those types of situations. Our current conception of the Smith and Carlos legacy finds it contextualized within “American Dream” rhetoric, attributing their legacy fully to their own self-reflexive courageousness, ability and personal merit. If a critic were looking to sum up this current reading of their legacy using Burke’s (1941) notion of a proverb, one might consider, “hard work pays off.”

While both athletes undoubtedly exhibited a great amount of hard work and personal perseverance in their journey to the medal stand, attempts at interpreting their legacy solely through this lens reinforces many of the same dominant ideologies of sport critiqued within the literature review above. The belief that “hard work pays off” aligning with the belief that success in sport is only based on personal merit. Therefore, as a strategy for accessing political agency, it does not function well as “Equipment for Living.”

The purpose of this thesis looks to offer an alternative reading of the Smith and Carlos podium moment to give that situation a different name, and in doing so, provide alternative “Equipment for Living” that fosters access to political resources. In looking to decipher the Smith and Carlos legacy to make an allowance for the political agency that they possessed on the medal stand, I argue that what often gets left out of the mix was the access they had to resources and structural institutions which provided them the agency and reflexivity to resist hegemonic ideals and traditions. As Hartmann (1996)

notes, “much of their demonstration and political work leading up to [the Olympics] was not the free-will or spontaneous act of two isolated and autonomous individuals” (p. 551). Read this way, if a critic were looking to sum up the rhetorical moment of their podium protest using this same Burkean principle of a proverb, one might consider, “the pathway to the Olympic podium rests on social and educational resources.” My motivating purpose throughout this paper in offering an alternative reading of this moment is to illustrate the importance of accessibility to resources toward the social and political mobility of marginalized and disenfranchised groups.

In this regard, as a rhetorical critic I am going to take the “Equipment for Living” that the athletes’ work provided to help illustrate how sports narratives change when we apply it throughout. Using “Equipment for Living,” I will essentially look to “re-name” their legacy so that it no longer reads as that of individual hard work and perseverance, but instead illustrates the importance of access. Accordingly, I will engage in a close reading of what I am defining the 1968 Tommie Smith and John Carlos Olympic protest movement narrative, to highlight the importance of resources within the context of agency attribution.

To help guide this analysis, I will be pulling from a number of artifacts, including: the personal biographies of Smith and Carlos, an oral history personal interview with Dr. Harry Edwards (Professor Emeritus at University of California at Berkeley and creator of the Olympic Project for Human Rights movement), a 1:30 YouTube clip of the 1968 Olympic Medal ceremony from the 200m final, the actual snapshot image of Smith and

Carlos standing on the podium, as well as the memorial statue that was unveiled at San José State University in 2005. When choosing these texts, I looked for a variety of artifacts that spanned a specific time frame. I wanted to create somewhat of a timeline with my artifacts, as to provide an arc of their narrative that the reader can follow. These artifacts allow the reader to identify and follow the different locations of agency throughout this timeline.

### **Chapter Three: Renaming the “Podium Moment”**

In recent years, mainstream society has come to view Tommie Smith and John Carlos as cultural icons and pioneers within the civil rights struggle in America. The current romanticization of their protest has been ingested by contemporary media and permeated throughout public consciousness. However, as the following analysis will attest to, this current treatment of the Smith and Carlos legacy does not do justice to the rhetorical work that they accomplished. In the pages that follow, I attempt to construct an alternate interpretation of the Smith and Carlos narrative to “re-name” how I feel their legacy should be read.

#### **The Statue and the Legacy**

The Statue defined in this analysis refers to the memorial statue of Tommie Smith and John Carlos that was erected on campus at San José State University in the fall of 2005. The original idea to construct a statue first came to culmination back in 2002, from a group of students looking to pay proper respect to the efforts of Smith and Carlos (Zirin, 2005). Political science major Erik Grotz and his classmates were challenged by their professor to be more active in politics and cited the efforts of Smith and Carlos, in addition suggesting that the two former San José State University students had not been properly recognized for their actions (Smith, 2011).

As a member of the Associated Students on campus, Grotz organized a project in December of 2002, called “The Celebration of Student Advocacy through the Tommie Smith and John Carlos Commemoration Project.” Defining the 1968 protest as one of the

most memorable moments in the American Civil Rights Movement, the project recognized that Smith and Carlos had been students at San José State and that their protest fought for the treatment of African-Americans, empowered the African-American community, and proved through their courageous act that student advocacy is of utmost importance to bring attention to social issues that affect their community and their nation (Smith, 2011).

Over the next three years, a number of campus events and rallies honored Smith and Carlos and worked to raise funds for the statue. Additionally, a number of guest speaking appearances and fund-raising events were coordinated and held by the Associated Students. When all was said and done and the fundraising efforts had been completed, on October 17, 2005, 37 years and one day after their 200-meter race and subsequent protest, the university unveiled a 22-foot statue of the two former San José State students on the medal stand, made of fiberglass, covered with ceramic tiles, and faces and fists of bronze (Smith, 2011). With a crowd in excess of 1000, the campus finally paid permanent tribute to the former students. Most importantly, the event was attended by Smith and Carlos themselves, who after years of suffering had come full circle in the heart of American consciousness. Among others, the event was attended by a number of dignitaries, including Harry Edwards, and Peter Norman, the second place winner in the same 200m race.

Attempts at contextualizing the statue within the larger legacy of the Smith and Carlos narrative allows us to view the complexities of agency attributions that existed

between the dominant culture and the athletes themselves. Going back to 1968, in the decade following their demonstration, Smith and Carlos continued to struggle financially. They continued to work odd jobs and other than a few news stories here and there, much of the national media chose to condemn them and their protest, or simply forget about it altogether. Not much had changed as far as societal views of what they did in Mexico City, as it continued to be a polarizing topic amongst the majority of Americans.

However as time went on, American views on race and society began to see an ideological shift towards a more progressive perspective and public opinion of Smith and Carlos began to change. As Hartmann (2003) notes, interpretations of Smith and Carlos began to change in the 1980s, when “Americans suddenly began to associate a whole new set of memories and meanings with the athletes once described to them as ‘racist, black-skinned storm troopers’ and the image they had associated with urban violence and rioting not even a quarter of a century earlier” (p. 265). One of the first hints of this shift was in 1984 when Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee (LAOOC) president Peter Ueberroth delineated Smith and Carlos as special consultants on minority affairs for the `84 Los Angeles Olympic Games. This was important in that it not only served as an olive branch between both athletes and America, but also within the Olympic framework as well.

Throughout the 1980s, a number of other actions contributed to this new revisionist history of Smith and Carlos through a more progressive lens. During this time, a number of sports journalists and researchers wrote a number of articles and

scholarship dedicated to retelling the Smith and Carlos story through this new lens. Among them, arguably the most revealing version of this new revisionist history came in the summer of 1991, when *Sports Illustrated*, the same magazine that twenty-three years earlier had publicly lambasted both athletes, composed a two-part special dedicated to their story titled “A Courageous Stand” (Moore, 1991; Hartmann, 2003). Throughout the next decade, these romanticized readings of Smith and Carlos became the norm, and on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their stand in Mexico City, a number of national magazines, newspapers, and television stations paid tribute to the moment with various acknowledgments and remembrances (Hartmann, 2003). More recently in 1999, HBO produced a documentary of the entire 1968 protest movement titled “Fists of Freedom.”

Coinciding with this newfound collective American consciousness, a number of landmark social events also contributed to this ideological shift. The third wave of the feminist movement was under way fighting for the rights and liberties of women. The LGBT movement continued to gain momentum within the public consciousness. For African-Americans, while there were still elements of inequality and discrimination in the country, the 1980s and 90s saw a vast shift in race relations as a whole in America. All of this added to the shifting in public opinion of Smith and Carlos and the context of what their message in Mexico City stood for. When San José State University enacted plans on honoring both athletes with a statue, along with creating a physical site for public memory, it represented the American consciousness coming full circle and re-accepting Smith and Carlos back into society.

Going back to our agency conversation, part of this transformation of Smith and Carlos from national villains to American civil rights icons has come at a cost. To begin, the statue was built over 35 years after their controversial gesture, shining a light on the amount of time for the university to recognize the value or need to remember the former student athletes on campus (Smith, 2011). This is important because it shows that this process of redemption and reparation was done exclusively within the constructs of mainstream consciousness and illustrates a shifting of agency from the athletes themselves to that of the dominant structure.

As the revisionist history of Smith and Carlos has become more accepted among Americans, arguably the biggest implication is that their narrative has been re-written largely within the confines of dominant cultural conceptions. Hartmann (2003) argues that the transformation of their image “goes back to the dynamics of cultural remembering and rehabilitation . . . the cultural processes by which “radical” images, objects, and practices such as those associated with the 1960s are appropriated and transformed into commodities available for mass-market consumption in ways that dilute or subvert their original meanings and intentions” (p. 268). Additionally, widespread racial reforms and transformations in the framework of sport in the 1970s also contributed to this shift in revisionist history. Now, as dominant society has come to recognize Smith and Carlos as heroes, they have re-articulated what the protest means by highlighting the courageous, heroic aspects of the moment and disregarding much of the controversial, “inappropriate” aspects deemed unsuitable for mainstream consumption.



We can see this in how contemporary society has re-written the Smith and Carlos narrative. As both athletes have been recognized as pioneers and popular culture icons for some of their “braver” accomplishments, like standing up against racism and discrimination, with a number of honors, degrees, et cetera for their courage; the more polarizing, revolutionary aspects of their narrative, such as their overt disdain for White America and their decision to infuse politics with sport, has been re-fashioned or simply left out. As Hartmann (2003) notes, “the actual experiences and grievances and radical intent that prompted their decision have been neglected or ignored in favor of their individual courage and an abstracted commitment to equality, dignity and justice” (p. 269). Historical theorist Simon Henderson (2010) notes a similar insight:

The radical messages of the civil rights struggle have been ignored as a conservative agenda has sought to proclaim the successful emergence of a color-blind society in which individuals of any race or creed have equality before the law. Since the 1980s, Smith and Carlos have been championed as civil rights heroes, and their stand offered as a touchstone for racial pride. The broader and more complex meanings of their protest have been ignored and they have instead been cited as courageous men who made a stand for equality in sport and wider society (p. 91).

## **The Image**

In the time that has passed since the 1968 demonstration, along with the athletes themselves, the actual snapshot image of the protest has garnered both national and international acclaim and become symbolic of the moment itself. Immediately after the demonstration, the image was disseminated across many print and electronic platforms. The image in this analysis is a tight shot of all 3 athletes standing on the podium (Norman, Smith, Carlos) with Norman standing facing the flag and Smith and Carlos performing their famous pose. Originally, the image emanated from a photo snapped by *Life* magazine staffer and six-time Olympic photographer, John Dominis (Osmond, 2010).

The image provides another complex text for analysis when viewed through the framing of our agency conversation. As the historical narrative of the Smith and Carlos story has continued to grow, the image itself has taken on many different forms and contexts. As noted by Osmond (2010), “the image has become one of the world’s most famous and enduring sports images, as it has been widely produced within the past forty years” (p. 120). The recognizability and “evocative potency” of the image has led to its reproduction in numerous ways and places (Osmond, 2010). Hartmann (2004) argues that the image has assumed a “prominence and power as an object of meaning and collective memory” (p. 176). However, throughout the revisionist history of the image, many of the different meanings and connotations that are attached to it have worked to

shift the attributions of agency away from Smith and Carlos themselves to a number of external entities. The following analysis will look to locate agency within these sites.

Going back to 1968, immediately after their demonstration, both athletes were kicked out of the Olympic Village and subsequently sent back home to the United States by IOC officials. When they arrived back home to the U.S., their message was met with mixed reviews. Some supported what the athletes stood for and some lambasted them. However, the majority of those in power that controlled the dominant structures in America were strongly against the statements made and worked to make sure both athletes would both feel the brunt of what they did for years to come.

In the years that followed, Smith and Carlos were essentially black-balled from American society. There was little or no support for the athletes on the part of the media and public opinion was largely against them. This shifting of agency resulted in Smith and Carlos, for the next 20 plus years of their life, becoming relegated back to a marginalized status. In the aftermath of the Olympics, Tommie Smith was denied a chance to pursue a career with the Los Angeles Rams, who had negotiated a possible contract with him prior to the Games (Henderson, 2010). His marriage broke down; he received death threats and was unable to make ends meet before taking a coaching job for which he was over-qualified in Santa Monica (Henderson, 2010). When he returned to San José State College to register for his final semester and ROTC classes, he was advised to turn in his uniform and keep his mouth shut (Hartmann, 2003). John Carlos

also suffered immensely, receiving a number of death threats and an inability to find work.

At this time, the results were pretty clear. Smith and Carlos had taken their stand, the majority of dominant culture had turned against them, and there was little support that materialized and little to no social change that was produced. However, this would not spell the end of the narrative for both athletes, as the years that followed saw their narrative re-written and a shift of agency from Smith and Carlos themselves to a number of external entities that generated new meanings and contexts of their gesture. This is particularly evident when analyzing the image itself. Looking back to 1968, while this firestorm of adversity was occurring within the personal lives of Smith and Carlos, happening alongside in concert with all of this adversity, the image was quickly taking on new contexts all of its own, generating new forms of agency by new groups that helped to re-define it.

The image was burned into people's memories and the public consciousness; it would be referenced, remembered, ruminated upon, and intensely argued about in numerous communities and contexts for years to come (Hartmann, 2003). In his structural analysis of the 1968 Olympic protest, Douglas Hartmann (2003) views the image of Smith and Carlos as a contested terrain, in that "the ideas, ideals, interests, and identities these two athletes represented and quite literally embodied continued to vex the American establishment, athletic and otherwise, for the better part of the next decade" (p. 170).

As the image began to circulate and create different meanings and contexts, it was adopted and in part became synonymous with many of the counter-culture movements of the late 60s and early 70s. Photographs of the Smith and Carlos salute began appearing in head-shops, student-movement headquarters as well as a number of radical postcards and churches throughout the country (Hartmann, 1996). As the image became more recognizable, it became more or less synonymous as a symbol of resistance to the dominant, mainstream American culture. While many different groups during that time took to identifying with the image and re-contextualizing it, arguably the biggest carrier of the image was the Black community.

The aftermath of what transpired in Mexico City saw Smith and Carlos as heroes in their Black communities, and that moment served to galvanize Black unity in ways that they could not imagine (Greenberg, 1999). While Smith and Carlos were considered marginalized within the dominant American social structure, Black America found solace in what they did, and as a result, new forms of agency began to materialize as the image gained different contexts. Following the demonstration, the fist became the universal sign for Black pride within the Black community. Dr. Steven Millner, professor of African-American studies at San José State University and student during the 1960s protest noted, “We saw the fist as not only a courageous gesture, but as symbolic of black men that would stand up in a racist society” (Greenberg, 1999). Dr. Michael Eric Dyson, Professor of African American studies at Georgetown University attested, “That moment was as profound as Rosa Parks’s refusal to stand up on the bus. Following this, black

people throughout the country were greeted by each other and signaling pride by raising the fist” (Greenberg, 1999).

When Smith and Carlos returned home from Mexico City, they tried their best to garner support and gain a following whenever they could. Amongst their supporters, college campuses were an especially popular forum for celebrating their gesture (Hartmann, 2003). In the years that followed, they spoke at a number of Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU’s), lead meetings sponsored by different fraternities and sororities and even spoke at a number of Black leadership conferences. However, unlike the mobilization efforts that were so successful with the OPHR movement, many of these venues that they spoke at were grassroots organizations and did not have many of the same resources available. Particularly at the HBCU’s, there was a lack of funds, resulting in many times them ending up speaking for free, or a hat within the audience being passed around for donations (Carlos, 2011). This led to some of the hardships that both athletes would experience for the subsequent years and put a considerable damper on their rhetorical agency pathways. So while the Black community and others were able to ingest the image and re-signify it within many different contexts, Smith and Carlos themselves went largely unrepresented as far as being able to use their platform as a way to generate agency and garner upward social mobility.

### **Implications of the Current Smith and Carlos Legacy**

Read in this context, we can see some of the larger implications that arise when we accept their narrative as it has been traditionally written. While mainstream society

has become accustomed to recognizing the statue and image as a way to forever memorialize and honor the legacy of Smith and Carlos, in doing so they have simultaneously worked to erase the rhetorical work and political power that their protest generated. Through this memorialization, the “Equipment for Living” that both athletes provided has been lost. Going back to the agency argument in this paper, recent times have seen a shift in agency from the athletes themselves to that of the dominant structure.

As this thesis argues, without access to structural institutions and resources, groups and individuals are deemed powerless in their quest to generate agency, regardless of how hard-working or persevering they are. Immediately following their 1968 protest, we saw Smith and Carlos experience a number of hardships in their lives through society’s collective shaming of them. Now, as society has more recently come to accept their message, indeed it has come at a cost. As our reading of their current legacy has established, their message has become largely commodified and exploited by the mainstream. When American society turned its back on them immediately after their demonstration, they were unable to maintain access to the resources necessary to dictate their own narrative and as a result witnessed a stripping of their capacities as independent rhetors. In our close reading of the image, we saw a similar commodification of their message moving towards a number of peripheral “points of articulation,” shifting it away from its origin and modifying its meaning (Kohrs-Campbell, 2005).

As time has gone on, we continue to see this commodification of their iconic image and legacy. As Zirin (2005) notes, Smith and Carlos’s frozen moment in time has

“been consumed and regurgitated endlessly by the wide world of corporate sports.” Every five years or so there is another commemorative anniversary of the event to highlight just how far America has come since the 1960s. For example, during television coverage of the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, Spain, commentator Jim Lampley featured a piece underlining the life and struggles faced by Tommie Smith. In the piece, Lampley found celebration in [Smith’s] life, stating, “Among many dramatic changes since 1968, one concrete one strikes us tonight: World record holders no longer go hungry, and it’s entirely likely they never will again” (Leonard and King, 2009, p. 218; Bass, 2002, p. 347). In 2008, at the Beijing Olympics in China, the Smith and Carlos narrative was revisited again by the mainstream media as a backdrop for some of the social and human rights issues that were going on in China at the time. However, as Leonard and King (2009) note, this recent widespread celebration of both athletes has taken place, “not for the sake of understanding Smith and Carlos, or even bringing into focus the importance of the “struggle” of Black athletes during the 1960s, but rather as a means to celebrate American racial/sports progress and silence/condemn today’s Black athletes” (pp. 218-219).

### **Alternative “Equipment for Living”**

In the context of the larger Smith and Carlos narrative, the “Podium Moment” functions as the “Equipment for Living” that they provide us. For the purpose of this study, the “Podium Moment” offers important takeaways in relation to how I am re-contextualizing their narrative. The current legacy of Smith and Carlos offers one kind of



“Equipment for Living,” and my analysis of “The Podium Moment” proposes an alternative “Equipment,” one that brings awareness to the role that social and educational resources play in securing political agency. While their current legacy defines their narrative using heroic individual back stories and themes such as hard work and perseverance, this alternate reading takes the emphasis off of their individual skill and experience and argues otherwise that they would have never stepped onto the podium without access to all kinds of social and educational resources.

In this analysis, “The Podium Moment” represents both athletes ability to resist the status quo and hegemonic narratives of sport and society. They quite literally “re-named” the Olympic victory rostrum from a non-political space to a political one, in the process providing a platform for them to merge politics and athletics. Read in this manner, the “Podium Moment” re-wrote how we traditionally viewed sports and in doing so helped to transform the arena of sport into political “Equipment for Living.”

### **The Podium Moment**

“The Podium Moment” constitutes a 1:30 second clip of the raw footage of the 1968 Olympics 200m final victory presentation. The clip begins with the camera focused on Smith and Carlos walking out onto the medal stand. They are both walking with their hands behind their back, shoes in their left hand, black socks pulled up their calves, along with a black glove on each hand (Smith’s right hand and Carlos’s left). Flanking behind them is the second place winner, Australian Peter Norman. Norman, who also played a role in the victory stand celebration, and who is wearing an Olympic Project for Human

Rights button affixed to his warm up jacket. Once all 3 athletes are at the podium, the announcer introduces each athlete and instructs them to take their place on the medal stand. After they take their positions, Olympic officials present each athlete with their respective medals, along with an olive branch sapling to Smith for first place. The camera then cuts to the Star - Spangled Banner being played, with Smith and Carlos facing the American flag, heads bowed, one arm extended donning a black-gloved fist. The next scene jump cuts to Smith and Carlos walking out from the infield grass to a chorus of boos. The footage ends with Smith once again throwing his fist into the air while leaving the stadium, followed by Carlos doing the same thing.

The “Podium Moment” offers a rich text for analysis because it allows us to locate the power dynamics that were at play within the larger narrative of their protest. Going back to the agency argument in this paper, the aim is to highlight some of the different structural resources that they accessed. For Smith and Carlos, there were many structures and resources that they were able to tap into that contributed to the rhetorical agency that they exhibited on the medal stand. Among these, one of the key resources and structural components that they were able to utilize as a source of power was their involvement with the OPHR in context of the overarching emergence of Black athlete activism in the 1960s.

Going into those Games, as a movement, the OPHR had made quite an impact as a vehicle for social change. In addition to the number of other successful boycotts and activist movements that the OPHR conducted leading up to the Olympic Games, one of

their biggest political victories was marked by the IOC revoking South Africa, a nation known for its colonialist practices with apartheid, from Olympic competition in Mexico City. The exclusion of South Africa marked a political victory of international significance for the OPHR and the African-American athletes that represented it because, as Edwards (1969) notes, “for the first time African-Americans had united with other black nations to defeat forces in the world that were seeking to perpetuate racism and discrimination” (p. 149).

Although the OPHR was largely disbanded by the time the Games began in October of 1968, the movement had served its purpose for the competing athletes in its ability to mobilize resources and garner a large amount of attention both nationally and internationally. For Smith and Carlos, this gave them a platform and voice that existed outside of the traditions and ideologies of American sport as well the Olympic framework.

Along with their OPHR involvement, Smith and Carlos had gained a level of agency in their standing as elite athletes. While their identity construction as athletes was still largely a result of the dominant culture, their visibility as rising international track stars gave them a social capital not had by many other African-Americans at that time. For example, Smith and Carlos were able to secure shoe deals with Puma, one of the few companies that were willing to attach their name to the branding of polarizing OPHR African-American athletes. The Puma deal granted them agency from within the context of a dominant social institution. At the time, Puma was one of the official outfitters of

the U.S. Olympic team; and by being affiliated with a major shoe company and popular culture influencer such as Puma gave them a certain social influence and social status.

In today's society and even more so in the 1960s, athletes (especially African-American athletes coming from marginalized backgrounds) have been commodified and exploited for their skills and talents. As the literature review explicated, these exploitive actions on the part of the dominant culture can work to strip these athletes of agency as well as solidify an existing social order. For these groups, to successfully resist and overcome these constraints it becomes essential that they first become aware of what is happening around them before social change can occur.

As stated, hegemony works to foster these oppressive ideologies within constructs such as common narratives. In the analysis of the "Podium Moment," at this point in the Smith and Carlos narrative, the accessibility to the resources and education that they received allowed them to reflexively be aware of what was happening around them and operate outside of the parameters of dominant ideologies, both within American culture as well as the framework within the Olympic Games. While on the podium, they utilized a number of rhetorical strategies that allowed them to disseminate their message from the unique position they were in.

### **Defining the Situation: Intersectional Rhetoric**

Immediately after securing 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the 200m final, respectively, Smith and Carlos were escorted through an underground tunnel to an area underneath the stadium that housed all of their belongings including their warm-up suits. While there

still remains uncertainty about the exact details of what was said, both athletes agreed that they would pinpoint a number of symbolic gestures in making some type of statement on the medal stand. In the John Carlos biography *Why?* Carlos explained his need to protest:

I wanted to create a protest to tell the world that the black man and woman dominate the Olympic Games, and this particular Olympics is a black Olympics for blacks all over the world. This protest is a protest to mourn the deaths of all the black women, men, boys, and girls that died fighting against the European kidnapers on the shores of Africa. Then to those who died in the Middle Passage along the way. Then to those who were beaten unmercifully by the slave masters, being separated from family, religion, and language...Somebody had to say something about the mistreatment of black people around the world...My whole purpose was to use that world stage to represent blackness (p. 98).

Right before they left to head out onto the victory podium, Smith reiterated to Carlos, “the national anthem is sacred to me, this can’t be sloppy, it has to be clean and abrupt” (Moore, 1991, p. 73). The black gloves that would subsequently be worn on the medal stand originated from Smith’s wife at the time, Denise, who initially bought the gloves for Smith in the event that he had to shake hands with IOC president Avery Brundage, who at the time was accused of having ties to Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany. When both athletes marched out onto the track for the victory ceremony, there was a shift of the

location of agency transforming them from agents in an athletic arena to political agents in doing so re-defining what it meant to be a world class athlete.

One of the most powerful and more recognized elements of their stand was the raised fist that both athletes exhibited while on the medal stand. Traditionally recognized as a sign associated with protest rhetoric, the fist is synonymous with resistance and confrontation. Throughout history, a number of groups, including the Socialist Workers Party, Jewish Defense League and the Feminist movement have all adopted adaptations of the raised fist as a rallying cry and symbol for defiance and resistance. Being able to utilize a longstanding tradition such as the fist gesture allowed Smith and Carlos to coexist within the dominant framework of Olympic customs, while simultaneously re-signifying and re-naming what the ritual stood for in a way that was implicit and for the most part universally understood.

In this same regard, the moment in and of itself created resistance and confrontation within dominant and existing forms of racial identity (Bass, 2002). Their demonstration utilized the pervasive and normative conceptions of America and offered new representations by replacing the dominant image of the American flag with that of a black-gloved fist (Bass, 2002). In MacAloon's (1984) structural analysis of the Olympic victory stand ritual, he argues that by working through sport (or through Olympic traditions and customs), as opposed to completely protesting against it, Smith and Carlos challenged an institutional-symbolic system that had made great claims about being a

positive, progressive force for African-Americans to explicitly recognize and represent race, to finally live up to its claims.

By existing in this “hybrid” political situation, one in which they resistively defined, they were able to create a new rhetorical space. This transformation of power and agency can be characterized as an intersectional rhetoric. According to Enck-Wanzer (2006), an intersectional rhetoric refers to a form of protest that is “not privileged or disciplined by single rhetorical forms (e.g., verbal, visual, or embodied forms),” rather it places “multiple rhetorical forms on relatively equal footing and draws from a number of diverse discursive political or rhetorical conventions” (p. 177). The Smith and Carlos protest called for them to respond in a way that was inventive and resourceful, calling upon their limited resources as marginalized individuals.

As Dwight Conquergood (2002) notes, “subordinate people do not have the privilege of explicitness, the luxury of transparency, the presumptive norm of clear and direct communication, free and open debate on a level playing field that the privileged classes take for granted” (p. 146). In this regard, Smith and Carlos provided “Equipment” through their ability to rhetorically re-name the Olympic podium so they could claim it as a political platform rather than just an athletic platform.

Through being able to create this resistive hybrid political situation provided them access to other forms of agency. For example, one critical component to the dissemination of their protest was the usage of a visual medium. Recognizing that these were the first Olympics to be broadcast in color, they understood that any type of

demonstration that they did would be burned into the collective memories of anyone with access to a television. While the 68` Olympics had a drop-off in viewing audience when compared to other recent Olympics of that time, the Smith and Carlos protest generated a 27 share and reached a prime-time peak of 14.3 rating points, gluing a huge number of viewers – approximately 400 million worldwide on the event (Bass, 2002). By capturing this audience through their inventive rhetoric, they were able to resistively gain power within one of the very dominant institutions (media) that contributed to holding them back politically and socially.

As MacAloon (2002) notes, in Olympic tradition, “once the anthem has begun, it cannot be stopped, and for fifty-odd seconds the audience was imprisoned, forced to read the anthem’s message and [Smith and Carlos’] simultaneously” (p. 108). By being able to tap into such a large television viewership, their gesture functioned as a visual rhetoric, in that it allowed the audience to interpret the gesture so as to extract meaning from it. (Brummett, 2006).

## **Embodiment**

According to Strathern and Stewart (1998), the term embodiment refers to “the anchoring of social values and dispositions in and through the body, with primary reference to the human body” (p. 237). As mentioned earlier, the physical bodies of African-American athletes have been historically defined and constructed by dominant cultural conceptions. What makes the “Podium Moment” such a classic text for analysis is the literal embodiment of its message. It represents a paradigm shift from athletes



“being defined by their bodies” to athletes “defining their bodies.” In analyzing the agency present in the “Podium Moment,” a lot of its rhetorical discourse stems from the embodiment of their message. Embodiment allowed them to step outside of the cultural norms and traditions of the Olympics to redefine who they were as both as people and athletes. As elite professional athletes, embodiment gave them a space that otherwise they most likely would not have been granted as African-Americans at that time.

Because their message was multi-faceted in that they were resisting some traditions while accepting others, embodiment allowed them to more clearly disseminate their message, helping to alleviate possible mis-interpretations of its content and variables such as language barriers. This is important because while much of dominant society attempted to label their protest as exclusively a “Black power” protest, the agency that they generated from their physical bodies served as a means to distinguish what constructs they were resisting and what they were supporting. In the handful of interviews following their gesture, Smith and Carlos were able to elaborate on the numerous meanings of their symbolic protest.

One characteristic of the “Podium Moment” that challenged this notion of it being an exclusive radical demonstration was the strategic position of Smith and Carlos on the medal stand. Here we see juxtaposed against their defiant clenched fists with their bowed heads, an intentional act of respect and deference to the American flag, almost in a semi-religious pose. Particularly for Smith, his combination of closed eyes, bowed head and overall upright posture offers a very strong sign of respect to both to the American flag

and the moment itself, a far cry from the militant theme that typically gets attached to the gesture.

John Carlos also exhibits a similar juxtaposition in his representative choice of attire. While on the medal stand, Carlos is wearing his team USA warm up jacket, an obvious nod to his country. Yet, at the same time, he has his jacket unzipped to pay homage to blue-collar workers in America (a strict dress-code violation of Olympic protocol). Additionally, underneath his warm-up jacket, he is wearing a solid black t-shirt to cover the USA lettering on his track uniform, a decision Carlos did intentionally to protest racism in America.

The overarching point in drawing attention to the rhetorical strategies in the “Podium Moment” is to illustrate that Smith and Carlos were acting as self-reflexive rhetors at this time in place on the medal stand. However, through our alternate reading of this moment, we can see that much of the agency that they tapped into to create the hybrid political situation they were in came as a result of their accessing the social resources that enabled them to achieve both the mental and physical capacity to carry out their protest. Resources such as access to college and Dr. Harry Edwards’ classes provided them an opportunity to generate a social consciousness to recognize a need for change.

## **Chapter Four: “Re-Naming” the Smith and Carlos Legacy**

As the first section of this analysis explicated, contemporary society’s treatment of the Smith and Carlos narrative and memorialization of their legacy has allowed much of the political “Equipment for Living” that they provided to become erased. In this section, through an examination of Smith and Carlos’ personal biographies, I look to offer an alternate way of how we read their legacy and sports narratives in general. Essentially, in much the same way that Smith and Carlos were able to “re-name” the Olympic victory rostrum as a political space, I look to “re-name” their biographies so that they no longer read as stories of individual hard work and perseverance, but instead highlight the importance of access. Through my critique of their biographies, my aim is to help recapture the political part of their legacy and make their rhetorical “Equipment” available to future generations in a wider context. Read through a Burkean lens, I show how Smith and Carlos’ biographies can function as “proverbs-writ-large” in that they teach us the importance of access. In this following examination, we will identify some of the external resources that both athletes utilized in their quest to become athletes and subsequent political advocates.

### **Athletics as a Craft**

For Smith and Carlos, their ability to hone and perfect their craft as world-class sprinters was instrumental in their ability to access agency pathways. As more access to resources became available to them, they were able to gain the notoriety and social standing necessary to move up in the social order, and this afforded them opportunities

that were not available to the majority of other African-Americans at that time. In this context, the mastery of sport became not only an opportunity, but a lesson about how to access agency. This was crucial for Smith and Carlos, because this was not something inherent that they were born with, it was “cultivated” and formed as they went through the process of mastering their athletic craft.

### **The Roadmap to Success**

Because Smith and Carlos were not born with the reflexivity to alter the world around them, their opportunities had to first present itself. For Carlos, his true calling would not present itself until his teenage years, in the form of track and field. However, as Carlos (2011) states in his autobiography, track was the last thing he thought would transcend him as an athlete, and he did not realize his true potential until he was made aware in an unusual way:

[As a child] I always dreamed of making the Olympics, but I never thought it would be in track and field. When there was nothing to do, [our friends] would have races through the streets and I would always leave my crew in the dust. But to me, running meant three things: It was how you trained for other sports, it was how you delivered messages as fast as possible through the projects to the grown-ups, and it was what you did to escape the police. That last reason was at the heart of my extracurricular activities, and it's what eventually made people notice my running to the point where I finally found my calling (p. 18).

Carlos was made aware of his ability to run extremely fast by stealing from trains and delivering food and clothes to his poor community (Kohls, 2012). Considering himself the local Robin Hood, Carlos and his friends would often break into a train yard nearby his house and raid the cars of their cargo to feed and clothe the people in their community. After word got around the community that this had been going on, the police started to get involved as they tried to chase down Carlos and his friends from the yard. But he was always so fast on foot the police could never catch him. Often running with two 25-pound sacks of food on each shoulder, Carlos was still easily able to outrun the police and watchmen, and this would give him a reputation around the community as an athlete.

Eventually one day his luck ran out and he was apprehended by two officers. They pulled him aside and essentially told him that he was on a one-way path to jail if he kept up his antics. However, they also informed him that the community had been abuzz about his amazing athleticism and speed. Instead of arresting him, they gave him an opportunity to train at the New York Pioneer Club, one of the premiere track clubs in New York at the time. This was significant for Carlos, because it allowed him for the first time gain access to resources (coaching, equipment, competition, etc.) and this allowed him to see some of the benefits that could be available to him as an athlete. “To train at the Pioneer Club was to enter a space where resources and equipment were everywhere and poverty was something that was kept outside the front door” (Carlos, 2011, p. 48).

Through this opportunity, he now not only recognized an opportunity to advance a skill set, but also had the resources necessary to do so. It was here where Carlos began to take running serious as a legitimate craft and recognized the agential pathways that could be accessible to him. With so much skill already present, it did not take much for him to cultivate his craft into that of an elite sprinter and as a member of the Pioneer Club he would immediately shine. Subsequently, as he continued to work on his craft, would eventually parlay his talents into accepting an athletic scholarship to run track at East Texas State University, before ultimately meeting up with Tommie Smith as teammates at San José State College.

For Tommie Smith, his calling would also present itself in the form of athletics. However, his ability to access the resources necessary for him to develop his talent as a runner was made possible by an influential outside source, his middle school teacher, Mr. Focht. As an underprivileged youth, Smith grew up spending most of his days working with his family in farm labor camps to make ends meet. Often working 10-12 hour days, work was always a priority and there was not much time to attend school. Because of this, Smith was often written off as disinterested by his teachers and not given much attention in class. Additionally, due to the nature of the farm work, his family was forced to relocate frequently and was never able to set a solid foundation, further hindering his ability to stay at a school.

However, when Smith was in the seventh grade, he was introduced to a man by the name of Mr. Focht, a teacher and track coach at one of the schools he attended in

Northern California. Mr. Focht was unlike any of the other teachers Smith had growing up in that he saw a potential in him. In his autobiography *Silent Gesture*, Smith (2007) recounts the racist culture at the school he attended and how Mr. Focht was different:

The teachers made you feel substandard from the beginning, in the class in which they were supposed to be teaching you and preparing you. They made sure that you knew they preferred to see and hear from the little girl in the front row, the very prissy one, the one who had the right answer all the time because she had the opportunity to get it long before you ever did, because her family was oriented academically long before she was even born, while yours was oriented in the fields working for her family and usually didn't have the time or capability to educate you right or instill education as a value. Mr. Focht was different. As a teacher he brought out the academic belief in myself, and as a coach of the track team he showed me what can be accomplished through athletics (p. 60).

Through Mr. Focht's coaching and instruction, Smith's natural ability as an athlete began to present itself. And while this would begin to open doors for him as far as track and field, Mr. Focht's influence would change him in bigger ways than just improving his running technique. Recognizing the dire financial situation the Smith family was in, Mr. Focht was able to offer Smith's father a steady income as a janitor and bus driver. This allowed for the family to stay in one place and not have to change schools. For Smith it allowed for the first time for there to be an emphasis on education.

In addition, Mr. Focht became Smith's travel team coach and they would travel everywhere they could within a 25-mile radius (Smith, 2007). This allowed Smith to gain exposure to major college coaches from a young age, and as he continued to grow into his potential, had already established a pathway towards attaining a college scholarship. As he entered high school, his talents continued to flourish and college recruiting letters began coming in. Ultimately, Smith would decide to enroll at San José State College on a full athletic scholarship, where with the later edition of Carlos, would form one of the most formidable track programs in the country (Jacoby & Mandt, 2009).

### **Politics as a Craft**

For Smith and Carlos, access to resources gave them the ability to master and hone a craft, which presented them with certain privileges that allowed them to venture outside of their past social parameters and move into mainstream outlets. Among these privileges was the opportunity for them to obtain a higher education, which as a result, equipped them with an emerging racial consciousness to question what was happening in the world around them. This education, as Hartmann (2003) suggests, "was imperative in their developing a deeper understanding of the history and circumstance of racism in the United States" (p. 47). As Tommie Smith notes in his autobiography, the curriculum he was exposed to at San José State College proved crucial in furthering his awareness on social issues:

As time went on at San José State I became more aware. I wanted to find out more about [social injustices], so I could deal with them both on a realistic and



academic level – so I could talk about it from a base of education, rather than from just being a black man. It was my incredible fortune that San José, and the college, was one of the emerging centers of thought and activism about the rights of humans according to this nation’s own Constitution. There were a number of San José State students who were highly motivated academicians and who were much more knowledgeable about the atrocities of the system than I was. Their presence and my own circumstances and growing awareness got me to reading and thinking and researching the history of this country: the slavery issue, the Constitution, everything that had to do with being a viable entity in the American system (p. 95).

As college helped Smith and Carlos gain a more definitive political stance, they became more interested in voicing their views and opinions, and began to realize that their standing as nationally recognized track athletes could allow them to attain pathways to have a public platform to engage in political discussion. Along with academics, this recognition of a newfound political awareness presented itself through an emergence of black athlete activism that was beginning to occur throughout the country.

Coinciding around the same time that Smith and Carlos were becoming successful as elite athletes, there was a larger movement that was materializing which saw an influx of other African-American athletes throughout the country begin to take more of an aggressive stance when it came to speaking out on political issues. As there became more of an awareness of the power that sport had in confronting political issues, more

and more Black athletes began using their social standing as a vehicle towards activism. It is important to establish here that this newfound political awareness allowed them to challenge many of the dominant oppressive ideologies and exploitation tactics that worked to withhold agency from the majority of marginalized athletes competing on both the professional and collegiate levels.

### **Emergence of Black Athlete Activism**

Along with the momentum of the Civil Rights movement, the late 1960s marked the rise of Black athlete political activism. While earlier examples of Black athlete activism were present as far back as the proposed boycott of the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the 1960s in particular were responsible for ushering in a new level of socially conscious athlete. In point in fact, at no point in time since the 1960s has America seen such a rise in political activism among athletes. During this tumultuous period, the majority of Black athletes in America felt an overall sense of hypocrisy in the way they were treated as citizens, and using their notoriety as a springboard into mainstream consciousness, began voicing their concerns. Shedding their traditional conservative approach to racial matters, black athletes spearheaded the “athletic revolution” by exerting a new-found sense of independence and willingness to speak out on racial issues (Wiggins, 1988).

As a group, they tried to come to grips with their conflicting roles as athletes and Black Americans by continuing to distinguish themselves in sport while at the same time combining with others in the Black community to denounce everything from the lack of Black executives in professional sport to racial exploitation in college athletics (Wiggins,

1997). College programs were specifically targeted as a contested site due to their high visibility and perceived importance within American society. Because athletics have traditionally held a certain amount of weight within the dominant structures of American society, through their collective mobilization efforts, Black athletes hoped to generate political agency through the leverage they maintained within these structures.

The majority of this activism was led by college athletes and predominately took place on college and university campuses. All in all, during the 1967-68 academic year alone, Black athletes and students revolted on 37 different major college campuses, and on all of these, athletics was the main device used to leverage change (Edwards, 1969). These revolts ranged from simple demands, such as changing the classification of Black people from Negro to African-American, as was demanded by the Black athletes and students at Iowa State University, to more serious ones, such as demanding the resignations of some of the tenured faculty and coaching staff at schools such as the University of California Berkeley and the University of Washington in Seattle (Edwards, 1969).

In 1968, nine Black track and field stars were kicked off of the team at University of Texas at El Paso by head coach Wayne Vanderburg after protesting the Mormon Church's treatment of Blacks (Olsen, 1968). Later that same year, five Black football players at Princeton threatened to boycott the team after accusing head coach Dick Gregory of "racist tendencies in coaching" (Wiggins, 1988). This emerging activist climate would ultimately serve as a source of empowerment for Smith and Carlos to

understand racial politics in sport, and would set the stage for their subsequent actions and silent protest.

### **San José State College/Harry Edwards**

When Smith and Carlos first set foot on a college campus (John Carlos at East Texas State and Tommie Smith at San José State College), they began to notice the great amount of hypocrisy happening around them. As standout athletes, they were granted certain opportunities that were not afforded to other African-Americans, but at the same time felt that they were being tokenized and exploited because of their athletic abilities. Tommie Smith would notice this shift when he first arrived on the San José State College campus. Now revered for his talents, Smith observed a new level of notoriety and social acceptance. Around campus, he was well known by both students and professors alike. However, outside the social boundaries of school, Smith experienced a great deal of racism and discrimination. While he was a superstar on the track, off of it he had to deal with a lot of the same social disadvantages as the rest of the African-American community.

When Smith went looking for campus housing around the San José area, he was unable to find anything suitable close to campus, and when he went to join fraternities on campus, he was denied entrance because of his race. Going through these experiences was an eye-opener for him, as he soon realized no matter how many accolades he gained as a sprinter, off of the track not many things had changed overall for the plight of African-Americans. As Hartmann (2003) suggests, “San José State brought [Smith] into

intimate and uncomfortable contact with white culture, power, privilege, and racism itself” (p. 47).

Growing increasingly frustrated with this new double identity he was forced to adapt at San José State College, Smith turned to his studies for answers. Understanding the importance of his education, Smith enrolled in the few African-American studies courses offered on campus. It was here where Smith was reunited with former friend and teammate, Harry Edwards, a sociology instructor on campus. Edwards, who previously attended San José State College on an athletic scholarship, was now teaching there while a doctoral candidate at Cornell University. Smith had a prior relationship with Edwards as they were both track teammates when Smith was a freshman and Edwards was a senior (H. Edwards, personal communication, November 14, 2013). For Smith, Edwards would play an integral part in educating him about the racial injustices he experienced as an athlete and in society as a whole. Edwards, who had personally already been exposed to this ongoing struggle for Black athletes in America, brought these experiences with him to the classroom. At the time there were only a handful of African-Americans enrolled at San José State College and the majority that were enrolled were athletes there on athletic scholarship. Edwards, who had relationships with most of the Black student-athletes on campus, was at the forefront of pushing for social activism amongst them:

The guys that took my class knew about my history [as a scholar]. They also knew about my athletic background, and they knew that I understood enough of what was going on, and had the courage to tell them the truth about what was

going on, not just here, but nationally. Because there was an interlocking direction between the NCAA, the people who ran the programs like at San José State, and the International Olympic Committee, it was the same wolf we were dealing with that was exploiting our talents, and so forth (H. Edwards, personal communication, November 14, 2013).

Along with his faculty position, Edwards had an active role in many of the African-American clubs on campus. In 1967, Edwards created the United Black Students Association (UBSA), an organization aimed at fostering social justice within the African-American community on campus. Among the chief aims of the UBSA was more Black student recruitment (outside of athletics), more Black faculty on campus (at the time Edwards was one of two African-Americans instructors on campus), and more overall equality on campus (H. Edwards, personal communication, November 14, 2013). Edwards convinced Smith to join the UBSA and it was as a member of the UBSA that Smith first began to notice how his standing as an athlete could provide an avenue for him to practice political activism.

As Edwards began to organize students, he made clear to the student-athletes the political leverage they had on campus. Edwards encouraged athletes to mobilize their resources and organize and focus their goals to create systemic change. One of the first initial actions of Smith, Edwards and UBSA was engineering a revolt of Black students and athletes, which included a rally on campus and the boycotting of a football game between San José State College and the University of Texas at El Paso. The significance

of this event was that sixty of the seventy-two African-American students on campus (out of a college enrollment of 24,000) banded together and for the first time in history utilized collegiate athletics as a lever to bring about social, academic, and political changes at an educational institution (Edwards, 1969). This proved to be a critical moment, because, as Edwards (1969) puts it, “We had learned the use of power – the power to be gained from exploiting the white man’s economic and almost religious involvement in athletics” (p. 47). This was equally important for Smith, because it marked the first instance where he successfully used his social standing as an athlete to enact social change. Furthermore, it illustrated the importance of access, as without accessibility to the UBSA and Edwards’s tutelage, he would have not been able to enact this rhetorical strategy.

Along with the work of the UBSA, Edwards continued to encourage his student-athletes to think critically and independently in his classroom lectures. For Edwards, his message was simple: in order to enact any sort of social change or activism, it was first important to be aware and educated of what is going on around you. As a former athlete himself, Edwards recognized the dangers of buying into the traditional “common narratives” of sport and pushed his athletes to think outside of the box:

The thing that politicized them was not anything that I brought to them. It was opening their eyes about what they had already lived and were already living. My mission was to incite athletes to think, to look around and be honest. Don’t get caught up in the mythology generated by the mass media, whose basic job was to

brainwash you. The heroics that are seen on Sundays, the heroics that are seen on game nights, sit atop a racist cesspool of exploitation and disrespect that Blacks kind of set aside to get it done. In point and fact, turning the other cheek was built into the integration and molded as a price of getting access. You've got to ignore all of the other stuff, even the racism from the superiors, from the teammates, from the environment, you've got to ignore all of that. And my position was, coming back from Cornell, with everything that I had been through and learned was not only do you not have to ignore, but you have a responsibility to deal with it (H. Edwards, personal communication, November 14, 2013).

### **Olympic Project for Human Rights (OPHR)**

Coming off of the momentum created from the successful protest, Edwards and the UBSA looked to move forward and take more aggressive steps towards fighting for equality. Meanwhile for Tommie Smith, growing increasingly frustrated with his situation at school, was also adamant about finding new ways to speak out. During a sit down conversation between both Smith and Edwards at Edwards' office on campus, they discussed the different avenues and possibilities available to them. Out of this discussion, they decided that their next plan of action would be to check the attitudes of other world-class athletes toward a revolt of African-American athletes over the problems facing black athletes and the black community in general (Edwards, 1969). Through this they found that not only track athletes, but a number of African-American athletes in other sports supported the possibility of boycotting the 1968 Olympic Games in the



interest of bringing recognition and awareness to racism in America. Working explicitly against the popular and racist White establishment view that Black athletes should be grateful for what sport had given them, athletes such as Otis Burrell, Lew Alcindor, Bill Russell and Lee Evans assessed what they had given sport and found the returns lacking (Plec, 2009).

Understanding the level of support they had, they formed an organization to map out the revolt. At a meeting held at Edward's house on October 7, 1967, the Olympic Project for Human Rights was born. According to Edwards, this boycott was based out of a demand for dignity and respect among African-American athletes feeling taken advantage of and exploited by American society:

One of the questions I raised in 1967 was "why should I play somewhere where I can't work? And if we can't be head football coaches, how are they ever going to respect us? How are they ever going to hold us in high enough dignity to be head of state?" ... For Blacks, it was about demanding dignity and respect and basic human rights. It wasn't the Olympic Project for Civil Rights, it was the Olympic Project for HUMAN Rights. That is why I named it the Olympic Project for Human Rights. It was about basic human dignity and respect (H. Edwards, personal communication, November 14, 2013).

The OPHR, first headquartered and maintained by the San José State College student body, quickly grew into a larger movement with larger demands. In the period that followed the UBSA boycott, the OPHR would expand their aim implementing a well-

crafted political strategy, which took advantage of the visibility athletes enjoyed due to their athletic accomplishments and their political activity (Mathis, 1968). Additionally, the OPHR recruited a number of major players in the Civil Rights movement and in doing so legitimized the OPHR as a major activist movement. Among these leaders was Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, who at the time was President of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. With this new litany of support, on December 15, 1967 in New York, the OPHR presented their demands to the public, among these a boycott of the New York Athletic Club and a complete boycott of the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City.

### **The Addition of John Carlos/ NYAC Protest**

While all of this social activism was going on at San José State College, John Carlos was experiencing his own frustrations running track at East Texas State. To begin, when Carlos first attended East Texas State, the campus had only been integrated for a year, and needless to say there remained an intense racial climate. While in Texas, Carlos, who had grown up in somewhat diverse Harlem, now was forced to use restrooms and drinking fountains separate from his white teammates. Growing frustrated with his circumstances, Carlos had caught word of what was happening at San José State College and the OPHR movement. In late 1967, he transferred to San José State College to join the movement. For Carlos, this transferring of schools helped to cultivate a platform which allowed him to engage in political activism. San José State College had the resources necessary for him to mobilize his efforts and become actively involved with the

boycott that East Texas did not. No matter how self-determined, he would have not been able to advance a political message on that campus.

Now with Carlos and a host of other well-known athletes in tow, the OPHR was strong arm steady in their quest to boycott the Olympics. The first order of business in their list of demands and resolutions was the boycott of a prominent track meet held at the New York Athletic Club. The NYAC had a history of exclusionary membership practices, which included prohibiting blacks and Jews from joining the club. Thus, the NYAC track meet became a strategic choice of protest, not only due to the large amounts of visibility it created for the movement, but because it allowed OPHR to demonstrate that it could mend political posturing with tangible action to create change. As Edwards (1968) notes:

The central aim of the NYAC boycott was not to force the club to integrate black people into its segregated organizational structure, but rather to regain some of the dignity that black athletes had compromised over several decades by participating for a club that would not even allow a black person to shower in its facilities (p. 65).

As the meet grew closer, more and more prominent African-American track and field athletes began to join the boycott. And on February 16, 1968, the boycott went off as scheduled. Attendance was down 50%, and the times and distances registered in various events were mediocre at best (Edwards, 1968). One of the significant benefits of using the NYAC meet as a test run for the Olympics was the amount of outside support it

garnered. For example, the American Jewish Congress supported the boycott, despite its member's inability to participate directly in any demonstration because the meet began at sundown on a Friday and conflicted with Shabbat (Bass, 2002). Additionally there were a number of distinguished individuals who supported the cause, including Jay Cooper, chair of the Columbia University Black American Law Students Organization, Roy Innis, Associate National Director of CORE, and H. Rap Brown, chair of SNCC (Wiggins, 1992). As a result, the NYAC meet emerged as a formal coming out party for the politics of race within sport, indicating further that a large-scale boycott by African-American athletes was feasible (Bass, 2002). In relation to the agency argument in this paper, this growing support of OPHR allowed more accessibility into mainstream structural institutions and resulted in a developing collective agency among its members.

Throughout 1968, OPHR would go on to conduct a number of other successful boycotts and demonstrations that helped to mobilize efforts and gain both national and international attention. As the movement continued to gain momentum, it reinforced the collective agency among participating athletes, which allowed them to build the necessary infrastructure to challenge the institutional structures of the Olympics. However, as the Games drew closer, there began to be dissension among participating athletes about how to best achieve the demands the OPHR was after. Edwards (1968) explains, "Some athletes felt that to boycott the games would be self-defeating. Others simply felt that to boycott the games would be futile, because as they saw it, no one really cared about the Olympics anyway (p. 100). Hence, an official statement of the final status of the OPHR was announced at the 1968 Black Power Conference in Philadelphia,

PA. Ultimately, it was decided that the presence of the athletes at the Games was too powerful not to use, so alternative plans were devised once the athletes arrived in Mexico City. Ultimately it was determined that each athlete would participate in the Games, but each athlete would conduct their own individual forms of protest, focusing centrally around victory stand celebrations. They agreed upon this course of action to avoid the perception of a “Black Power” conspiracy and any potential repercussions.

While the unified boycott did not go off as planned, the OPHR had successfully achieved its purpose. Along with establishing a collective political agency among the competing athletes, it provided international visibility and access to cultural leaders and icons that worked to reinforce their political message. It was this access that ultimately led to the Smith and Carlos demonstration on the medal stand. As we re-read the personal biographies of Smith and Carlos as personal accounts of individuals gradually gaining access to social, political, and educational resources, we are able to recognize Smith and Carlos' athletic and political achievements as the result of access to resources, not personal merit or individual resistance.

Therefore, when we read these biographies as stories about access, they offer “Equipment” for accessing political agency that their current legacy does not. Overall, this alternative reading allows us to better understand what elements are necessary to locate agency within a rhetorical situation. As agency is “not the intentions people have in doing things, but to their capability of doing those things in the first place,” this alternate reading allows us to account for how Smith and Carlos acquired the “capability”

to carry out their protest (Giddens, 1984). In a bigger context, this thesis illustrates that access to agency is more the result of sociological variables as opposed to psychological. In recapturing the Smith and Carlos legacy and the political work it offers, we no longer read their story as the work of individual, emotion-driven, radicalized militants; but rather that of rational social agents with the calculated goal of taking political action through the assembling of structural resources.

From a theoretical standpoint, by recognizing access to resources as a conduit to gaining agency pathways, it allows communication scholars to better navigate the different theoretical conceptions of the term. As Kohrs-Campbell (2005) notes, agency can be viewed as a learned art, in that “it involves the study, training, and experience that enable one to recognize what means are available in a given situation” (p. 6). In this light, there are parallels that can be drawn between the process of gaining access to resources and agency as a “learned art.” Additionally, through highlighting the significance of structural resources, we can better situate the “ambiguous and shifting social location of agency” within rhetors (Herndl and Licona, 2007; Kohrs-Campbell, 2005).

## **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

Throughout the course of this thesis, I have offered an alternate reading of how we read sports narratives and more broadly the themes of power and success in society. Moreover, as a scholar, I have looked to contribute insights into our current conceptions of rhetorical agency within communication studies. Through my analysis of the Tommie Smith and John Carlos narrative, I have offered a critique of mainstream society's traditional presentation of their story to highlight the importance of access. Using Kenneth Burke's "Equipment for Living" to guide the study, I have argued that as a management text, their protest functions as "Equipment" because it allows us to recognize re-occurring situations in which people have limited access to valuable social institutions and resources..

### **Rhetorical Applications of Smith and Carlos as "Equipment for Living"**

Overarching, the aim of this thesis was to study the rhetorical dimensions of the narrative surrounding the Smith and Carlos protest, drawing from it a way of advancing how conceptions of rhetorical agency are theorized. The past several pages have advanced the view that athletic and political achievement is more about access than personal merit. While the analysis is held specifically to sports narratives, the arguments explained here are analogous in other contexts as well. In society today, there remains a notion that the most talented and capable individuals will eventually rise to the top and those who do not simply are not talented enough or hard-working enough to make it. This hegemonic notion allows dominant groups to remain in control and a social order to

be justified. Because dominant groups are typically the ones that have access to the most structural resources, the power structure is rarely upset, allowing a status quo to flourish. If we take this “template” of the Smith and Carlos narrative and apply it throughout in other contexts, we can see similar outcomes.

A good example of this is in education, in which there is a notion that the smartest individuals in society are smart because they are naturally gifted and were born that way or they worked the hardest to get where they are. What is often not taken into consideration is that the majority of individuals who get to that level come from backgrounds where resources are plentiful and there are opportunities available to advance enrichment. Additionally, the majority of top-level educational institutions often are extremely expensive to attend and, aside from those numbered few who get scholarships, they price out a lot of demographics based on the high costs to attend. This results in the only students with access to these exclusive institutions are the fortunate few that have the capital to attend.

I argue that if we read the Smith and Carlos story as a lesson about access, it can be applied to *most* cultural realms in society. As “Equipment for Living,” the story helps us to name reoccurring situations in which people have limited access to valuable social institutions and resources. Recognizing those situations as “stories about access” rather than “stories about personal merit” provides us with a different strategy for addressing those situations. As Burke (1973) argues, by being able to codify reoccurring situations helps name typical social relationships that recur cross-culturally and throughout time so



frequently that people must “have a word for it.” If we are to codify the Smith and Carlos narrative as “Equipment for Living,” we can use them to recognize other examples. One particular example that I think illustrates these insights is in politics. Historically, those who end up holding political positions and controlling the policies that govern our country have typically been those with access to the resources and capital necessary to do so. Even looking at our current President Barack Obama, while he was not born into the elite class, his pathway to the presidency was still highly reliant on his ability to gain access to resources. Examples of this include his financial aid and student loan assistance to get him through college, as well as his access to Harvard, one of the top educational institutions in the country. Furthermore, if we are to recognize agency as the capacity to gain access, President Obama’s opportunity to run for commander-in-chief did not present itself until he was called upon to deliver the keynote address at the 2004 Democratic National Convention, a venue which gave him access to a new and untapped audience. Quite literally using a political platform to deliver his message, the speech ultimately led to his party nomination and subsequently his position in the White House. In similar fashion to Smith and Carlos, the agency displayed in President Obama’s keynote address was only made possible through his ability to access resources.

### **Limitations of this Study/Future Research**

This study, as any, has its limitations. One of the main limitations I felt restricted this study was that it lacked the voices of the actors themselves. Throughout this process, I attempted to reach out to both Dr. Carlos and Dr. Smith for oral history interviews, but

to no avail. While the reach of this thesis was to study the larger ideological implications of their protest, having the personal claims of both athletes would obviously offer a more in-depth perspective of their narrative. I feel any future study that was looking to piggyback off of the insights provided from this thesis would be greatly enhanced if they could get the viewpoints of both athletes. Specifically in this regard, I felt I was limited when trying to locate research on the personal histories of Smith and Carlos when trying to formulate my argument, so I feel having direct access to them would help alleviate this challenge.

Another limitation of the study was that it only represents the viewpoints of one person. As a rhetorical critic, I tried my best to articulate a well-formulated position to advance an argument, however the fact remains it is just the result of my personal effort. I think to further strengthen the dialogue on this topic I would like to see other scholars provide their own treatment to this subject matter, whether that be in a project similar to this thesis or a different direction altogether.

With that being said, the exciting thing about the Smith and Carlos story as a research topic is that their legacy is such a rich text for analysis, there are so many different angles that can be tapped into for future research. One fascinating insight that I came across when conducting research for this project was the vast number of influential people that were a part of those activist and protest-rich 1960s that still reside in the Bay Area. As the Bay Area was such a historical center for much of the activism that took place back then, I think future studies that could tap into this pool of individuals to

uncover personal narratives, oral histories, etc. that could lead to an array of new insights. Also, attempts at triangulation between utilizing multi-method designs and/or paradigms could greatly enhance insights. In terms of this, I could envision studies that would focus on larger, all-encompassing projects that called upon focus groups, surveys, ethnographic research and in-depth interviews to bring new knowledge about the events of 1968. All things considered, this topic has a lot it can offer to communication and social science scholars and researchers.

### **Future Approaches to Sport Ideology/Final Thoughts**

As this project has illustrated, the arena of sport as an institution is both dynamic and complex. While the goal here was to uncover and demystify some of the larger ideological discourses that pervade the sports world, simply changing or re-naming this one dimension of the narrative is not enough to re-make or transform the multitude of dominant discourses that are ever-present in sports. For both academicians and greater society alike, it is imperative that we continue to push back and question some of our common held beliefs and perceptions about the sports world, as there remain many other aspects of American sports rhetoric that need critique. Much of the same struggles and inequalities that have persisted historically in the world of sport are still around today, they are just manifested in different ways and structures.

In this regard, critics should focus future research on the institutional power that continues to pervade the sports world. Everything ranging from nuanced power tactics such as dress code restrictions and “player celebration penalties,” to more blatant forms

of domination and control, such as exploitation within big business college athletics and the recent scandal involving Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling, there remain many unchecked areas of American sports ideology that need critique. As it is only through a collective and perpetual re-evaluation of some of our long held assumptions about sports will we be able to truly get a grasp of the power dynamics that exist.

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